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ABSTRACT

This publication offers summaries of presentations from a 2001 symposium on adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) research and practice. Presentations include the following: "Reading Research Synthesis" (Miriam Burt); "How Adults Learn to Read in English" (John Strucker); "Findings, Reactions to and Practitioner Implications of the 'What Works' Study" (Larry Condelli and Heide Spruck Wrigley); "Comments from an Instructor and Program Coordinator" (Sylvia Ramirez and David Red); "Comments from a Researcher" (JoAnn Crandall); "Comments from Teachers"; "'English for All' Video Series" (Mary Lovell); "Project-Based Learning" (MaryAnn Cunningham Florez and Lynda Terril); "Immigration Trends and Issues: A Look Ahead" (Frank Sharry); "English Language Learners with Special Needs" (Cathy Shank); "National Reporting System and ESL" (Ursula Lord); "Assessment Myths and Realities" (Carol Van Duzer); "Professional Development" (Mary Russell); "Distance Education and Classroom Education: The Hybrid Model" (Annette Zehler); and "Learning Disabilities Screening in Spanish" (Glenn Young). Data from participant evaluations of the symposium were strongly positive. Six appendixes list participants, presenters and facilitators, Office of Vocational and Adult Education and NCLE staff, government agencies and organizations, state-administered adult education program: 1999-00 enrollment, and challenges in adult ESL education. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.) (Papers contain references.) (SM)

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Proceedings of

THE NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ADULT ESL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

September 4-7, 2001

Held at
The S. Dillon Ripley Center
Smithsonian Institution
1100 Jefferson Drive, S.W.
Washington, DC

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), with the assistance of the National Center for ESL Literacy (NCLE), convened a National Symposium on Adult ESL Research and Practice on September 4-7, 2001. Nearly 100 representatives from all states, the District of Columbia, and the territories attended. The purposes of the symposium were for practitioners and administrators in the field to share challenges, concerns, and successes in providing English language instruction for adults, and to learn about national initiatives, issues, and opportunities in English language and literacy education.

Participants shared ideas, heard from researchers and expert practitioners, and discussed the latest initiatives in adult ESL education. Participants were encouraged to communicate information they gathered with colleagues in their states and local programs.

Convening a symposium on adult ESL was timely. Of the nearly 3 million adults enrolled in adult education classes in the United States in 2000, 38% (or 1,102,216 adults) were enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) programs that received funding from OVAE (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Given this large population of English language learners, the rapid growth of immigrant populations in states that formerly served few immigrants, and the new rules for reporting and program accountability required by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, it was important for practitioners, as well as administrators, researchers, and government officials, to share challenges, research, and strategies.

The Smithsonian's S. Dillon Ripley Center on the National Mall was the setting for the symposium. Smithsonian staff provided a variety of activities, educational materials, and museum-going opportunities for participants. The meeting venue itself and the museums on the Mall offered participants and presenters a congenial setting for learning and sharing, particularly related to the current English Literacy and Civics (EL/Civics) initiative and project-based learning opportunities.

Ronald Pugsley, division director of the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL), OVAE opened the conference on Tuesday evening, September 4, and again on Wednesday morning. He made the following points:

- Because the field of adult education now has data—not just anecdotes—to show successes, it is able to be included in the national discussion on education.
- Practitioners, programs, states and the federal government face many challenges as they strive to meet the needs of adult English language learners, particularly in states that previously did not serve large immigrant populations.

- OVAE's EL/Civics funding (70 million dollars in fiscal year 2001) is helping meet these challenges as programs help adults learn the English language in community and civics contexts that are important to them.

After the symposium concluded on Friday morning, September 7, participants were invited to the International Literacy Day events at the S. Dillon Ripley Center. Events included the dissemination of findings about literacy research in education for children and adults and the unveiling of a nationwide database of literacy providers developed by the National Institute For Literacy (NIFL, 2001).

On Saturday, September 8, 2001, symposium participants were invited to the First Annual Book Festival hosted by the Library of Congress and First Lady Laura Bush. The festival was held in the Library of Congress and on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol. Children, parents, writers, librarians, educators, and other interested adults shared the joys of books and literacy. .

Three days later, on September 11, the life of Washington, D.C. and the nation changed because of attacks by terrorists. In the aftermath, practitioners, programs, and the government have dedicated themselves to even greater efforts to assist adult immigrant learners and the country itself, particularly related to the complex issues of cross-cultural understanding.

The symposium addressed the following issues, which are summarized in the next section.

- Challenges to Adult ESL Instruction: The Practitioners' Perspective
- Reading Research Synthesis
- How Adults Learn to Read In English
- Findings, Reactions to, and Practitioner Implications of the *What Works* Study
    - Comments from an Instructor and a Program Coordinator
    - Comments from a Researcher
    - Comments from Teachers
- *English For All* video series
- Project-Based Learning
- Immigration Trends and Issues: A Look Ahead
- Challenges and Opportunities in Adult ESL Instruction
    - English Language Learners With Special Needs
    - National Reporting System and ESL
    - Assessment Myths and Realities
    - Professional Development

- Distance Education and Classroom Education—The Hybrid Model

- Learning Disabilities Screening in Spanish

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Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Pub. L. No. 105-220, § 212.b.2.A, 112 Stat. 936 (1998). Retrieved July 17, 2002 from http://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/asp/act.asp

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Education Department, Smithsonian Institution http://www.si.edu/portal/t1-education.htm

First Annual Book Festival, Library of Congress http://www.loc.gov/bookfest/

International Literacy Day, International Reading Association http://www.reading.org/meetings/ild/

National Institute for Literacy http://www.nifl.gov

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Smithsonian Institution http://www.si.edu

Session Summaries

Challenges to Adult ESL Instruction: The Practitioners' Perspective

Teachers and administrators discussed the challenges related to adult ESL instruction in their settings; shared ideas for addressing these challenges; and identified information, skills, and resources that would help them meet these challenges. In groups, participants then prioritized the challenges. The following issues were cited repeatedly:

- Assessment and accountability. Adult ESL educators encounter difficulty in finding or developing appropriate assessments that reflect what is being taught and that meet the requirements of the NRS; in teaching learners long enough to assess them; and in using reporting software and processes.
- Need for legitimacy of the field of adult education and, specifically, adult ESL. The lack of legitimacy causes or exacerbates inadequate pay, benefits, job security, and status.
- Staff and professional development. The part-time status of most adult ESL instructors, lack of funds to support training, and logistical challenges limit opportunities for staff development.
- Funding. Insufficient funding impacts assessment, staff and professional development, program stability, and improvement to the field.
- Multilevel classes and open-entry and retention. Appropriate class management is a challenge with multilevel classes; in open-entry multilevel classes with minimal staff development, it is hard to retain students; low levels of attendance make it difficult for programs to meet accountability requirements.

(See Appendix F for a summary of challenges. For a complete list of comments, see CAL, 2002, in the references list below.)

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Center for Applied Linguistics. (2002). Roundtable group comments. Retrieved July 17, 2002, from http://www.cal.org/ncle/symposium/rdtable.htm

READING RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

Miriam Burt, National Center for ESL Literacy Education

"Adult learners require literacy skills for their work, for helping their children and other family members, and for negotiating life in an English-speaking environment."

—Miriam Burt

Whether for students in preschool and K-12 or for those in adult basic education, GED preparation, and ESL classes, understanding the process of reading has been deemed of high importance for American society. What is different for adult English language learners learning to read in English? Do adults learn to read differently than children? How does the process of learning to read a second language differ from that of learning to read a first language? Miriam Burt, associate director of NCLE, asked the participants to work in groups to critique a draft of a synthesis of research on adults learning to read English. Commissioned by OVAE, the synthesis includes 47 studies published since 1980 on the reading development of adults learning English in adult education or college-based intensive English programs. The synthesis is made up of experimental or quasi-experimental studies, based on valid comparisons between groups; non-experimental studies that provide qualitative information based on a sound analytical framework; and theoretically oriented articles that lay out terms and processes used in the other studies.

Preliminary findings from the synthesis include the following:

- L1 oral proficiency appears to be a strong predictor for L2 literacy.
- L1 literacy also plays a strong role as well in L2 literacy; there appears to be some transfer of reading skills.
- Vocabulary learning is directly related to reading comprehension, and reading comprehension seems to aid vocabulary development. Both depth and breadth of vocabulary are important.
- More instructional time spent on reading seems to yield better outcomes.
- Instruction with materials related to the goals of learners will improve their skills related to these goals. The improved skills may also transfer to general reading ability.
- Adults with limited or no L1 literacy skills will learn more slowly than those with higher levels of L1 literacy. Learners with limited literacy should be given special instruction.

Participant comments will be taken into account when completing and publishing the synthesis, which will appear in print form. In the meantime, an annotated bibliography is available on NCLE's Web site (Adams & Burt, 2002).

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How Adults Learn to Read in English

John Strucker, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

"Multiple assessments should be employed when placing students in literacy programs. The use of oral reading and vocabulary assessments are especially helpful in determining which students only have difficulties with the language and which also have difficulties with reading." —John Strucker

Dr. John Strucker, researcher from the National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning (NCSALL), shared preliminary findings on how adults learn to read. Dr. Strucker discussed portions of his data and an analysis from his Adult Reading Components Study, which profiles both native and nonnative English-speaking adult education students (Strucker, Davidson, in press a, in press b). Data gathered from over 200 Spanish speakers looked at reading proficiency in both L1 and L2. One finding that supports what many ESL teachers have surmised is that, in contrast to the disproportionate numbers of native speakers of English in adult basic education, the percentage of adult English language learners with learning disabilities is probably no greater than that for the general population. Dr. Strucker also noted other implications for practice.

- Even students with a high level of literacy in L1 may need explicit instruction in decoding skills.
- Learners who are highly educated in their own language may benefit from faster-paced classes than are typically offered.
- Better methods of reading assessment should be developed.
- Further study is needed to determine the efficacy of native language literacy instruction in helping adults learning to read in English.

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National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning http://www.ncsall.gse.harvard.edu

Findings, Reactions to and Practitioner Implications of the *What Works* Study

Larry Condelli, American Institutes for Research
Heide Spruck Wrigley, Aguirre International

"I'm impressed because of the scope of the study and the well-thought out research design. I'm grateful because, in my opinion, ESL literacy students are not served well in many programs."

—Sylvia Ramirez, MiraCosta College, symposium participant

Dr. Larry Condelli, managing associate for the American Institute of Research (AIR) and Dr. Heide Wrigley, senior researcher for Language, Literacy and Learning, Aguirre International, presented their preliminary findings on the 6-year study supported by OVAE and the U.S. Department of Education's Planning and Evaluation Service (Condelli, 2001a, 2001b). The purpose of the study is to identify effective instructional practices to improve the English language skills of literacy-level learners. The study's primary research questions are the following:

- What combination of oral language acquisition and literacy development instruction most highly correlates with improved English reading, writing, and speaking of ESL literacy students?
- What combination of oral language acquisition and literacy development instruction most highly correlates with improving the functional literacy skills of ESL literacy students, such as filling out forms or writing a check?
- Do other classroom and instructional variables correlate with improving students' language and literacy development?

The methodology of the study included classroom observations. Field staff observed each of 41 classes an average of 9 times over a 6- to 9-month period in 1999, wrote a running narrative of classroom activities they observed, and then coded the narrative. In the study, each class was rated on 20 dimensions that were later analyzed. Analysis showed that classes fell into four categories according to the mix of literacy and other activities. Instructional features were also coded so that researchers could note what teachers were doing to facilitate learning and what learners were doing.

Dr. Wrigley described a conceptual framework for literacy that includes print awareness, bringing background knowledge to bear (schema), meaning-making (comprehension), understanding how language works (syntax, morphology, etc.), letter or symbol recognition, and phonemic awareness (Wrigley, 2001b). Using realia, environmental print, and working on projects in the community help adults

improve their literacy skills (Wrigley, 2001a). "Multiple literacies" for adult learners include the following:

- Initial literacy (environmental print and phonemic awareness)
- Literacy for self-expression
- Functional literacy
- Critical literacy (includes media literacy)
- Literacy as a tool for social empowerment
- Literacy for "new times" (technology)

Participants watched a video clip of the Test of Emerging Literacy (TEL) being developed as part of the National Reporting System (NRS) project, Improving the Quality and Use of NRS Data (Test of Emerging Literacy, n.d.). TEL is a standardized, performance-based, interactive and adaptive reading assessment that is being developed in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education (Condelli & Wrigley, 2002). Based on the belief that even literacy-level adult English language learners have much knowledge and past experience with print, the test uses a variety of real-life print materials such as soft drink cans and newspaper advertisement in an interview format to assess adults' reading ability.

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Comments From an Instructor and Program Coordinator

Sylvia Ramirez, instructor and program coordinator, MiraCosta College, Oceanside, California
Dr. David Red, program administrator, Fairfax County, Virginia

Ms. Ramirez made the following points:

- There are often problems in how ESL literacy learners are placed in classes (e.g., classes tend to contain learners with very different needs).
- Although complex teaching skills are needed for all levels of ESL instruction, study findings showed that in 9 (of 41) "literacy" classes observed, oral communication was the main focus, and that most of the literacy practice was controlled or guided language practice.
- There is a high rate of turnover at the literacy level, probably related to the multilevel nature of literacy classes. The turnover rate in turn challenges the abilities of classroom teachers to go beyond controlled practice.

Ms. Ramirez made the following two recommendations:

- Well-formulated research that includes interchange between the researchers and focus groups of teachers should continue.
- Meaningful, creative staff development related to the study's findings should be available and funded (Ramirez, 2001).

Dr. Red spoke from his perspective as a program administrator in a large, urban county that serves many thousands of adult English language learners and that now, because of the requirements of the National Reporting System, must collect standardized data about each learner's progress and be able to report the information in a numerical way to the state. Dr. Red made the following comments about the *What Works* study:

- It will be a challenge to synthesize what works in classroom practice so that it can be reported to the state to fulfill the requirements of the NRS.
- Some of the findings are not completely new. For example, Elsa Auerbach (1992) published findings from her research conducted at the English Family Literacy Project in Massachusetts in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This study was organized in a learner-centered manner. Have the findings of the current study—with its intensive observation, and somewhat limited scope—moved the field further than the Auerbach's earlier work?

COMMENTS FROM A RESEARCHER

Dr. JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall, University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus

Dr. JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall, coordinator of the ESOL/Bilingual Masters Program from the University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus, also reacted to the findings of the *What Works* study. Dr. Crandall, an advisory board member for the study as well as a researcher who directed a similar survey of instructional practices for K-12 English language learners, offered her insights on the problems inherent in such research, enumerated several strengths of the *What Works* study, and suggested future directions for research that can "deepen our understanding of adult ESL literacy practice, its learners, teachers, and classrooms, and their effect on student outcomes such as student persistence and student use of literacy practices."

Dr. Crandall had two comments on generalizing from the study:

- It is difficult to find enough adult ESL programs that appear "successful," and, in light of the overwhelming number of variables within the field, it is hard to find enough learners in these successful programs to make any claims to statistical significance. The number of learners observed over time was quite small, 298, and came only from 7 states. Because of this, the study was not representative of the nation as a whole.
- The *What Works* study was particularly challenging because it sought not only to identify a range of adult ESL practices, but also to measure effects of such practices on learner outcomes.

Dr. Crandall cited the following encouraging findings and strengths from the study:

- Learners who experienced "bringing in the outside" (Wrigley, 2001) or who were able to take the learning out of the classroom and transfer it to real-life situations persisted longer and performed better on a range of assessments.
- The *What Works* study recognized the multidimensionality of language and literacy; lay some groundwork for development of alternative means of assessment for learners; developed a multifaceted, detailed framework for classroom observation; and tried to both assess individual skills and provide portraits of literacy practice.

Dr. Crandall made the following suggestions:

- Further ways to use the data from the *What Works* study might include developing portraits of successful learners, teachers, and programs and supplementing current data with more information about teacher and program variables (e.g., teacher background and education, and the use of L1 literacy). To do this, interview learners and ask them about why they attend, drop out, and leave class

and then return, and what their goals and needs are. Such questions will provide information useful to practitioners and programs.

- Studies of L1 literacy and the cross-transfer of skills and practices are needed and should be funded.

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The Adult ESOL Labsite at Portland State University, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/labschoolcontact.html

Comments From Teachers

In groups, participants compared what works in their programs with the findings from the study. The varied responses reflected the diversity of programs and stakeholders represented as well as demographic differences.

- Several groups noted that the study validated work they were doing, such as using volunteers and tutors to provide extra assistance to literacy learners and "bringing the outside in."
- Many participants mentioned the need for more teacher training targeted to literacy teaching as well as more funding to support such training. Some participants suggested separating learners with limited education or literacy skills into their own classes.
- Many participants had concerns about the relationship between assessment and requirements of the NRS (National Reporting System, 2001) and the findings of the study. Would federal reporting requirements to show progress in short peri-

ods of time through a standardized process preclude using authentic materials to instruct and assess?

There was a wide range of advice about what information from the *What Works* study needs to be disseminated.

The following needs were noted in particular:

- A short video lesson that demonstrates teaching techniques for literacy-level learners should be developed and disseminated.
- Information about native language literacy should be disseminated.
- Information about the length of time it takes to learn a language should be disseminated to legislators.

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English For All Video Series

Mary Lovell, Education Program Specialist, U.S. Department of Education

> *"Video combines visual and audio stimuli, is accessible to those who have not yet learned to read and write well, and provides context for learning."* (Burt, 1999, p. 1)

Dr. Mary Lovell, education program specialist, Division of National Programs, OVAE, gave an overview and a sample of the *English For All* (EFA) video series (EFA, n.d.). The series is part of the California Cyberstep project funded by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (Sacramento County Office of Education, n.d.). The video series and its ancillary products—a Web site, 5 CD-Rom titles that include the videos and support materials and print exercises and activities—are intended to serve high-beginning-level adult English language learners as measured by the California State ESL Model Standards (California Department of Education, 1992).

The *English For All* project is disseminating sub-masters of the video series in SP-Beta format at no cost to each state director of adult basic education and literacy. Each state director would have full rights to duplicate copies and distribute copies throughout their states.

Participants viewed one 15-minute videotape from the series of 20 videos. As in the rest of the series, this video contained a real-life situation in which a character needs to solve a problem. Within this story context, simple grammar and usage points are addressed. To assist the process, a wizard character appears at intervals as the narrator to assist learners with language, content, and problem-solving issues.

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PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

MaryAnn Cunningham Florez and Lynda Terrill, National Center for ESL Literacy Education

"One of the purposes of the education that schools provide is to enable students to live in their society. Schools can not ignore what is going on in real life."

—Adult learner at Arlington Education and Employment Program (personal communication, June 15, 1997)

Project-based learning is a complex framework that integrates the four language skills areas—reading, writing, listening and speaking—and incorporates teamwork, problem-solving and other interpersonal skills into activities that involve learners in real-life contexts. NCLE staff members, MaryAnn Cunningham Florez and Lynda Terrill, presented an overview of project-based learning in the context of adult ESL teaching and learning. The discussion of project-based learning recalled Dr. Wrigley's discussion about "bringing the outside into the classroom" and was offered as a practical and engaging way for learners to learn English at the same time they are learning content that is relevant to their own lives.

The following points were made:

- Project-based learning is an important component in meeting the goals of the U.S. Department of Education's EL/Civics initiative. These goals emphasize instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and U.S. history and government in order to help adult students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to become active and informed parents, workers, and community members (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).
- Adherence to learners' expressed needs and goals as well as multiple perspectives and methods of evaluation are strengths of project-based learning.

The presenters examined one possible framework that teachers could use to help organize project work in classes and demonstrated how it could be used with a specific class. Participants were then given a scenario of another adult ESL class that included information such as class venue, intensity and level, learner demographics, and results of class needs assessment and learner goals. Participants were asked to go outside to the National Mall, use its resources, and develop the beginnings of a project that would be applicable to the second class. When participants returned, they made posters and shared their ideas briefly with two other groups. Project topics explored included learning about American presidents, comparing historical immigration patterns in the United States with learners' own experiences, and using art as a way to show multiple perspectives. A participant group consisting of program and state administrators talked about state level ESL issues such as how to offer quality professional development with limited funding and how

to capture learner progress in open-entry programs. The symposium participants reported that they enjoyed the project work and that project-based learning is a useful tool for fulfilling the purposes of EL/Civics. (For a complete list of comments see NCLE, 2002, in the references list below.)

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Immigration Trends and Issues: A Look Ahead

Frank Sharry, National Immigration Forum

"With their determination and hard work, with the progress they make, and the stories they share, the adult students remind me how glad I am that the United States is a nation of immigrants."

—Donna Moss, PBS, ESL/Civics Link, symposium facilitator

Frank Sharry, executive director of the National Immigration Forum (NIF), presented an overview of the history of immigration policy in the United States and talked about current issues in immigration. He discussed at length President George W. Bush's initiative to develop a special relationship regarding Mexican workers in the United States. Mr. Sharry enumerated reasons for a special immigration policy with Mexico:

- The United States and Mexico share a 2,000-mile border.
- Mexico is the largest source of immigrants and immigrant workers in the United States.
- Mexico now has a democratically elected president, Vicente Fox.
- President Fox has signaled his willingness to work cooperatively with the United States on immigration issues.

Other points Mr. Sharry made were as follows:

- The demand for quality ESL instruction is much greater than the supply.
- The Center for the New American Community is a new project of the National Immigration Forum. The purpose of the initiative is to "better enable newcomers to become full and equal participants in America, and better enable receiving communities to successfully incorporate immigrants and refugees" (National Immigration Forum, 2002, p. 1).

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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ADULT ESL INSTRUCTION

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Cathy Shank, West Virginia Adult Basic Education

> *"I've come a long way through the darkness to the light. I'll practice more often reading. I'll won't (sic) give up what I've learned with others."* (Almanza, Singleton, & Terrill, 1996, p. 6)

Cathy Shank, special projects coordinator, ABE Staff Development, West Virginia Adult Basic Education, presented basic information about learning disabilities in the adult education population. She also discussed the ways in which adult ESL learners may be the same or different from these other population.

Ms. Shank made the following comments:

- The rate of learning disabilities in the general population is estimated to be 5% to 10% (Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987). An estimate from U.S. Department of Labor suggests that 50%-80% of students in adult basic skills programs have learning disabilities (U.S. Department Of Labor, 1991).
- This high rate of learning disabilities among adult education students is based on the English-speaking population alone; there are no estimates of the rate of learning disabilities among English language learners (ELL)s.
- ABE learners and ELLs may come to programs with different needs. An ABE learner usually comes to an adult education programs because of a lack of basic skills. On the other hand, an ELL may have strong basic skills and just need to learn English.
- There are many reasons, other than learning disabilities, that adult English language learners might not make expected progress. These reasons include the following:
    - Lack of access to education in a learner's native country
    - Interference from the learners' native language
    - Stress related to culture shock
    - Trauma
    - Undiagnosed vision or hearing problems
- Formally diagnosing adults for learning disabilities may be useful for obtaining appropriate educational and job accommodations. Barriers to identifying adult ESL learners include the following:
    - No appropriate screening instruments available for multilingual and multicultural student populations

- No formal assessment instruments developed for adult nonnative or non-English speakers
- Few bilingual/bicultural professionals to administer formal assessments (even if they existed)
- Prohibitive cost in time and money to administer all the necessary assessments
- Impossibility of developing or translating screening instruments into all the language represented by the ESL population
- Resistance to the idea of psychological assessment by adults from some other cultures

- Despite these barriers, there are some reasons that adult English language learners who may have learning disabilities might want to be formally identified. Those seeking a GED or needing to receive appropriate accommodations or assistive devices in educational or job settings may need to be screened to receive these services.
- ESL programs should train teachers in the modifications and strategies that will probably be effective for literacy-level and beginning-level learners as well as those who may have learning disabilities.

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National Reporting System and ESL

Ursula Lord, U.S. Department of Education

"The National Reporting System will improve the public accountability of the adult education program by documenting its ability to meet federal policy and programmatic goals. The collection of state outcome data will enable states to correlate practices and programs with successful outcomes, and will also assist states in assessing progress in meeting their adult education goals. For local providers, the NRS will help instructors and administrators plan instructional activities and services to enhance student outcomes and to relate effective practices and programs with successful outcomes." (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p 1)

Ursula Lord, education program specialist, DAEL, OVAE, provided information about the uses and requirements of the department's system for reporting learner outcomes.

Ms. Lord discussed the following concerning the National Reporting System (NRS):

- The NRS was developed to support the goals of the Adult Education-Family Literacy Act of (AEFL), described in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 as the following:
    - assist students to become literate.
    - obtain the knowledge and skills for employment and self-sufficiency.
    - assist parents to obtain skills to be full partners in their children's education development.
- The NRS describes positive outcomes for adult learners. These include the ability to

- advance to the next educational functioning level;
- enter, improve, or retain employment; and
- advance to further education (such as obtain a high school diploma or GED).

- In the NRS, there are six educational functional level descriptors for English as a second language: Beginning ESL Literacy, Beginning ESL, Low Intermediate ESL, High Intermediate ESL, Low Advanced ESL, and High Advanced ESL. Each level has descriptors for speaking and listening, basic reading and writing, and functional and workplace skills.
- Local programs are responsible for gathering data, monitoring student levels, and reporting this information to their states, which then send the data to DAEL.

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Assessment Myths and Realities

Carol Van Duzer, National Center for ESL Literacy Education

"Assessment—tools to measure skills & progress, represent reality (what learners really learn) meet requirements over time, testing logistics, time, $, time it takes to show progress, personnel, personnel training"

—Challenge from symposium roundtable, Group 8

Carol Van Duzer, adult ESL program services coordinator, NCLE, continued the discussion of assessment and made the following observations:

- While the federal government has established standards for adult ESL program accountability, there are other national standards efforts such as those developed by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (2000) and Equipped for the Future (EFF) (Stein, 2000). Some states (e.g., California and Massachusetts) are also creating standards.

- Each state plays important roles in negotiating the measures of performance and in choosing what standardized methods of assessment will be chosen for use in individual states. While many states have chosen to use standardized tests such as the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1984) or California Adult Skills Assessment System (CASAS, 1996) other kinds of measures, such as performance-based assessment, can meet the requirements of the NRS (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).
- We must be wary of focusing too narrowly on testing and test scores. There are also many nonquantifiable learner outcomes (e.g., learner-self assessment and nonlinguistic outcomes) that are important to the learners themselves as well as to programs, states, and the nation.
- Since research suggests that it takes several years for a nonnative speaker to learn English well and 500 to 1000 hours of instruction to meet basic needs, programs should maintain reasonable intervals between test administrations. The NRS recognizes that learning a language takes a long time, so the percentage of learners who move to the next level may be low. In fact, each state has been able to negotiate NRS percentages according to what seem realistic goals for programs within the state.

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Note: Throughout the symposium some participants expressed concerns about the requirements of the NRS and about the dissemination of pertinent information from the federal government to the states, the District of Columbia, and territories, and to programs and practitioners. In response to an invitation by Ron Pugsley, director, DAEL, OVAE, several participants joined an early morning question-and-answer session about issues of assessment and accountability Some participants had questions about how the NRS could work appropriately and effectively with adult English language learners in their states and programs. Questions centered around a lack of sharing of knowledge between all levels of government and programs. Participants from several states expressed particular concerns about being able to appropriately and accurately demonstrate the progress of the most beginning levels of learners within the parameters of the NRS. Mr. Pugsley noted that he was aware of the need for delineating a broader and fuller range of performance than the baseline descriptors of the six ESL levels of the NRS, and that there are "more benchmarks to come." Practitioners and administrators will look forward to this information as it is released.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mary Russell, National Center for Adult Literacy

"More professional development that connects research to practice."

—Challenge to the field noted by symposium participants

Dr. Mary Russell, senior researcher at the National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL) made the following points about professional development for instructors working with adult English language learners:

- There is a wide diversity of programs, teacher experience and goals, funding, time, and—for online professional development—access to appropriate technology and support.
- Professional development should be interactive, respectful of the participants, have an element of reflection, and include all members of a program's staff.
- Practitioners and administrators need to be flexible in the ways they understand and promote professional development. One promising model is PBS' ESL/CivicsLink (PBS, 2002), an online development course for adult education ESL teachers. Slated to be operative in January 2003, ESL/CivicsLink will help teachers increase their knowledge and skills for teaching English to adults and integrating English literacy instruction and civics. Teacher-training topics include:
    - Meeting Learners' Needs and Goals
    - An Overview of Selected Teaching Approaches in ESL
    - Using Technology in the Classroom
    - Integrating Civics and English Literacy
    - Exploring Citizenship
    - Teaching a Citizenship Class
- The format for the online class follows good teaching practice for adult English language learners by
    - encouraging active engagement through project-based learning. Offering a venue for small group study with peer mentoring, and with both facilitated and non-facilitated models.
    - providing a customized portfolio in which teachers save journal entries, lesson plans, project work, and resources.
    - making available collaboration tools via threaded discussions and email.
- Another online professional development tool developed by the National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL) is the Professional Development Kit (NCAL, 2001). The PDK include s materials for ABE and GED as well as adult ESL teachers. Online there will be video resources of such activities as interviews of learners, teachers, researchers, and administrators; classroom practice; in-depth explorations of specific topic areas, an Internet site that contains tools such as discussion boards, teacher portfolios, and knowledge databases; and a participant's guide to the kit.

- Both the ESL/CivicsLink and the PDK and other similar tools (see the following discussion by Annette Zehler on Crossroad's CafÈ), combine online training with opportunities for learning offline in the classroom and community.

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Distance Education and Classroom Education–the Hybrid Model

Annette Zehler, Development Associates

"The Crossroads Cafe program, implemented as a hybrid model, challenges the teacher to take on a revised role and different responsibilities in working with learners."(Zehler, 2001, p.4)

Dr. Annette Zehler, senior associate, Development Associates discussed the challenges and the opportunities in distance learning as she learned from the research she conducted in a pilot study of Crossroads Cafe, a video-based distance-learning program for adult English language learners.

- In the study, 8 out of 9 sites used a "hybrid" model that combined independent use of video and ancillary materials with some face-to-face contact with an instructor. The contact varied across the program. While some instruction required specific meeting times, other instructors hosted drop-in sessions, and in still other cases the instructor was available as a consultant to answer questions.

- Results of the study indicated that the Crossroads program helped learners improve their listening and reading skills. Data and interviews from the study suggested that the hybrid model, which combines independent learner study plus some form of teacher input warrants further study.

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Learning Disabilities Screening in Spanish

Glenn Young, U.S. Department of Education

"The use of standardized testing to identify learning disabilities presents problems." (Schwarz & Terrill, 2000, p. 1)

Glenn Young, education program specialist for Adults with Disabilities, DAEL/OVAE, spoke to the symposium about OVAE's 2001-2002 field testing of learning disabilities screening devices in Spanish (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Mr. Young made the following points:

- For adult basic education (ABE), short questionnaires such as the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Learning Needs Screening Tool (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, n. d.) give practitioners and programs some assurance that they may be able to identify which learners may benefit from being formally test assessed to see whether or not they have learning disabilities. However, the situation and the needs of adults learning English are different from those of either children or adult native speakers of English. At a minimum, adults learning English should be assessed in their native language. As nearly half of the learners in federally funded adult education programs are English language learners, and as the majority of these learners are Spanish speaking, OVAE has chosen to develop a learning disabilities screening in Spanish.
- Adults who may have learning disabilities need access to services and resources that will help them to be respected members of the workforce.
- There exist promising assistive devices such as translators for adult English language learners who may have learning disabilities.

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RESOURCES

NCLE Resource Collections: Learning disabilities and adult ESL. http://www.cal.org/ncle/ResLD.htm

Seattle-King County Workforce Development Council Learning Disabilities Project. http://www.seakingwdc.org/ld/index.htm

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Closing Remarks

"*We have many challenges ahead. At the same time, this is an exciting time to be working the field of adult ESL. We are finally at the table, and we are participating in the local, state, and national conversations about education with increasing knowledge and expertise.*" —Dr. Joy Kreeft Peyton, symposium presenter

In her closing remarks, Dr. Joy Kreeft Peyton, director, NCLE, summed up the issues that the speakers had raised.

- Challenges remain in the field of adult ESL, but there are also positive changes based on our ever-increasing knowledge about learner populations and on quantifiable accountability measures that are valid and measurable.
- Research is underway in adult ESL in different areas including reading development and instructional practices with literacy-level learners.
- There are many resources available for adult ESL, including assessment tools and procedures, technologies, instructional strategies, and opportunities for professional development as mentioned in the symposium.
- The field of adult ESL needs to understand the importance of accountability and be able to collaborate across programs and states and share successful approaches.

Evaluation of the Symposium

"Variety of activities is commendable."
"More interactive; more discussion and reflection."
"I felt honored to be part of this symposium."
"Too many presentations vs. discussions."
"Great location."

—Comments from participant evaluations

1. *What knowledge or skills did you gain from your participation in this workshop?*
2. *What do you feel was your greatest contribution to this symposium?*
3. *As a result of this symposium, what information and/or skills will you bring back to practitioners in your state or program and how will you accomplish this?*

—Questions asked participants about the symposium

Participants were asked to answer the above three questions about the symposium content. Participants were also asked to offer suggestions for future symposia and to indicate what information and skills they would take back to their states or programs. Fifty-six participants turned in evaluations on site, and one participant e-mailed comments later. Overall, the evaluations were strongly positive, though they included several specific criticisms and suggestions for improvement and for future meetings (Evaluation, 2002). The following is a summary of the participants' responses to the three questions.

- Participants indicated that the most important knowledge they gained was the national perspective on issues facing the field of adult ESL. Learning about current research and research needs also ranked high. Others cited the opportunity to interact with professionals from other states and share experiences in meeting challenges at the state level. Contact information was exchanged for future discussions. Of specific content areas presented, assessment issues ranked highest, followed by project-based learning, immigration issues, learning disability issues, and English literacy and civics.
- Nearly half of the respondents felt that their greatest contribution was sharing how they are meeting the challenges of reporting requirements and increased ESL enrollments as well as sharing their own field experience. Information and knowledge shared included program design ideas, retention strategies, effective instructional strategies, materials and methods for teacher training, and principles of second language acquisition. Several respondents cited active participation in the table discussions and asking difficult questions as important contri-

butions. A few felt that networking and their ability to bring the information they were gaining back to the state and local levels were invaluable. However, several participants voiced the criticism that there should have been more participant sharing and opportunities for participation, and that there should have been either more time or fewer presenters.

- Many participants wrote that they had learned too much to list on the evaluation form and that they planned to take back all the information to their states and programs. Several noted that they better understood what was happening at the federal level and in other states. Over half of the respondents said they would give presentations about the symposium in state, regional, or local meetings, or disseminate information in writing.

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SUMMARY

The National Symposium on Adult ESL Research and Practice reflected the multi-faceted, complex, and dynamic field of adult ESL itself. Participants came from all parts of the country and U.S. territories, from tiny programs in rural towns and huge programs in big cities. They included teachers and administrators, highly acclaimed experts and researchers, and government workers at all levels—each coming to the symposium with different knowledge to share and problems to solve. In the different interests, needs, and background experiences that participants brought with them, the symposium resembled a multilevel class. And, like a well-taught multilevel class, learning took place at many levels. Participants expressed their frustrations with their low professional status and lack of access to training and funding. They also talked at length about their own initiatives and successes. Knowledge, expertise, commitment, and energy passed back and forth between presenters and participants, offering hope that the field will move forward to meet the challenges that face adult English language learners and the individuals and programs that serve them.

Appendices

Appendix A	Participants (Teachers and Administrators)
Appendix B	Presenters and Facilitators
Appendix C	OVAE and NCLE Staff
Appendix D	Government Agencies and Organizations
Appendix E	State-Administered Adult Education Program: 1999-2000 Enrollment
Appendix F	Challenges in Adult ESL Education

Appendix A

Participants (Teachers and Administrators)

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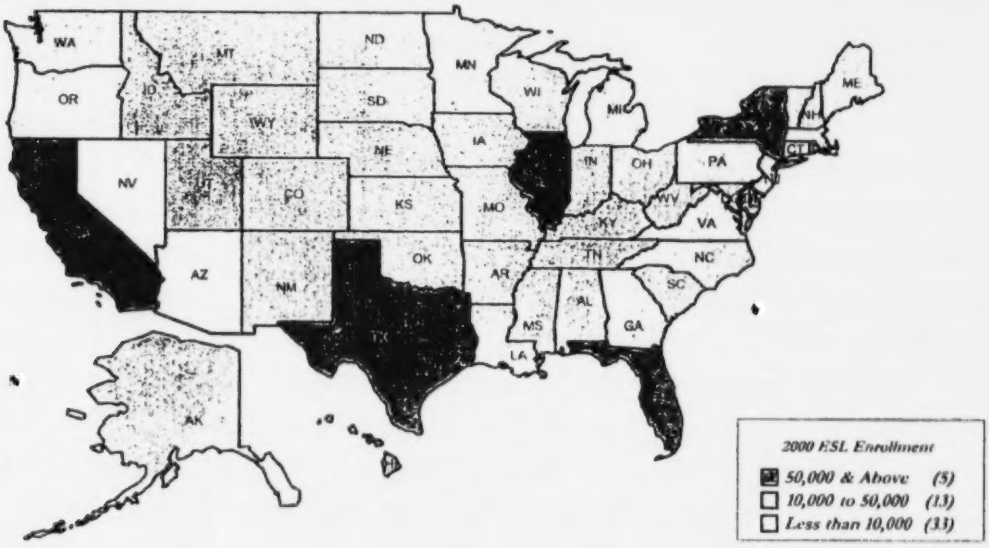
APPENDIX E

STATE-ADMINISTERED ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM 1999 – 2000 ENROLLMENT



Source: U.S. Department of Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education
Division of Adult Education and Literacy
August 2001

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Appendix F

Teacher Roundtable: Challenges to Adult ESL

During the teacher roundtable discussion, participants listed the challenges facing the field of adult ESL. Below is the prioritized short-list of challenges from each of the 12 groups:

Group1	support services multilevel classes
Group 2	funding for full-time, federally mandated teachers
Group 3	space wait lists retention, open enrollment/exit restructuring program scope and sequence to clients' needs qualified staff multilevel students in same classes funders understand language acquisition and its challenges for reporting
Group 4	professionalism set limits for number of students in classes—it's all we can do
Group 5	staff development (accessible, appropriate, consistent, staff-centered)
Group 6	national and state legitimacy of adult education immigrant expectations/disappointments community services awareness
Group 7	professional legitimacy for adult education
Group 8	assessment (especially LD)
Group 9	funding teachers knowing teaching strategies techniques for collecting data
Group 10	assessment funding
Group 11	multilevel/open-entry classes
Group12	assessment

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
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